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2001HANOI02150 - CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION H-01

INFO LOG-00 DS-00 EAP-00 TEDE-00 IO-00 OIC-02 SS-00
DSCC-00 DRL-02 SAS-00 /005W
-----193ABE 310808Z /38

FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3826
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
NSC WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
DIA WASHDC
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002150

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV
STATE ALSO FOR DRL
SECDEF FOR ISA/LSTERN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/11

TAGS: PHUM KIRF VM HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MEETING AND ATTEMPTED MEETING WITH RELIGIOUS FIGURES IN HCMC
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REF: A. HCMC 0699 AND PREVIOUS B. HCMC 0302

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES ROBERT PORTER.
REASON: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 14, STAFFDEL REES MET IN HCMC WITH HOA HAO RELIGIOUS ELDER TRAN HUU DUYEN WHO PASSED A LIST OF 20 HOA HAO PRISONERS, SOME OF WHOM MISSION PREVIOUSLY HAD BEEN UNAWARE. ON THE SAME DAY, THE STAFFDEL ATTEMPTED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO MEET WITH BUDDHIST MONK THICH QUANG DO WHO REMAINS UNDER ADMINISTRATIVE DETENTION, CONFINED TO HIS LIVING QUARTERS AND NOT PERMITTED TO RECEIVE VISITORS. END SUMMARY.

ATTEMPTED VISIT TO THICH QUANG DO

3. (C) ON AUGUST 14, JOSEPH REES (COUNSEL TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS) AND BRIAN GUNDERSON (CHIEF OF STAFF TO HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER) WENT UNACCOMPANIED BY TAXI TO THE THANH MINH ZEN MONASTERY, RESIDENCE OF BUDDHIST MONK THICH QUANG DO. QUANG DO HAS BEEN UNDER ADMINISTRATIVE DETENTION SINCE EARLY JUNE, CONFINED TO HIS LIVING QUARTERS. HE IS NOT PERMITTED TO RECEIVE VISITORS, AND THE PHONE LINES TO THE MONASTERY HAVE BEEN CUT (SEE REF A). UPON THEIR RETURN FROM THE MONASTERY, REES AND GUNDERSON RECOUNTED TO CONGENOFF WHAT TRANSPIRED THERE.

4. (C) REES STATED THAT THE TAXI DROPPED HIM AND GUNDERSON
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OFF ON THE NARROW STREET IN FRONT OF THE MONASTERY, AND THEY WALKED THROUGH THE OPEN GATE LEADING INTO THE MONASTERY'S ENTRANCEWAY. IN FRONT OF THEM WAS A PAGODA, AND TO THE LEFT WAS AN ADJACENT BUILDING, THE SECOND FLOOR OF WHICH IS THICH QUANG DO'S LIVING QUARTERS. ON ENTERING THE COMPOUND, REES AND GUNDERSON ENCOUNTERED AN ELDERLY BUDDHIST NUN AND A SMALL GIRL WHOM REES SAID HE JUDGED TO BE 10 OR 12 YEARS OLD. REES SAID HE TOLD THE ELDERLY NUN THEY HAD COME TO VISIT THICH QUANG DO. REES SAID THE NUN APPEARED TAKEN ABACK AND NERVOUS. SHE TOLD THEM IN ENGLISH THAT NO ONE WAS ALLOWED TO VISIT THICH QUANG DO. REES STATED THAT THE SMALL GIRL THEN EXITED THROUGH THE GATE. HE SAID HE EXPECTED HER TO RETURN WITH THE POLICE. HE NOTED THAT UP TO THAT POINT, HE HAD BEEN SURPRISED TO SEE NO APPARENT POLICE PRESENCE EITHER INSIDE THE MONASTERY COMPOUND OR OUTSIDE THE GATE.

5. (C) REES SAID HE AND GUNDERSON LOITERED IN FRONT OF THE

PAGODA FOR SOME MINUTES. THE ELDERLY NUN THEN INVITED THEM INTO THE VESTIBULE OF THE PAGODA, SAT THEM DOWN AND SERVED THEM TEA. HE SAID THEY WAITED AROUND FOR AT LEAST 20 MINUTES TAKING NOTE OF THE UNCOMPLETED RENOVATIONS AT THE PAGODA. THERE WAS NO ACTIVITY, NO SIGN OF THE LITTLE GIRL OR THE POLICE. REES AND GUNDERSON ASKED THE ELDERLY NUN ONE MORE TIME IF THEY COULD GO UP TO VISIT THICH QUANG DO. THE NUN WAS APOLOGETIC, ACCORDING TO REES, BUT ANSWERED THAT THICH QUANG DO WAS NOT ALLOWED TO RECEIVE VISITORS. REES SAID HE AND GUNDERSON DECIDED NOT TO PRESS THE POINT, TOOK THEIR LEAVE, AND RETURNED VIA TAXI TO THEIR HOTEL.

MEETING WITH HOA HAO ELDER TRAN HUU DUYEN
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16. (C) EARLIER THE SAME DAY, REES AND GUNDERSON, ACCOMPANIED BY CONGENOFF, VISITED HOA HAO ELDER TRAN HUU DUYEN AT HIS SMALL OFFICE IN HCMC. DUYEN THANKED REES FOR VISITING HIS FAMILY IN HCMC IN 1997 WHILE DUYEN WAS IN PRISON. HE ALSO SAID HE BELIEVED REES'S EFFORTS WORKING WITH HOA HAO LEADERS RESIDENT IN THE U.S. HELPED PERSUADE THE GVN TO RELEASE HIM IN A PRISONER AMNESTY IN 1998. DUYEN THEN PASSED THE STAFFDEL A LIST OF 20 HOA HAO PRISONERS AND PERSONS UNDER ADMINISTRATIVE DETENTION, FIVE OF THE NAMES OF WHOM MISSION PREVIOUSLY HAD BEEN UNAWARE. FOLLOWING ARE THE NEW NAMES AND TRANSLATIONS OF DUYEN'S HANDWRITTEN ANNOTATIONS:

LE VAN TINH (IMPRISONED AROUND 1990; Z30 PRISON, XUAN LOC)
LE VAN SON (IMPRISONED AROUND 1985; BADLY ILL; Z30 PRISON)
NGUYEN VAN DAO (IMPRISONED SOMETIME BEFORE 1999, BADLY ILL)
MS. PHAN THI TIEM (ARRESTED JULY 24, 2001 IN AN GIANG PROVINCE FOR INVOLVEMENT IN MS. THU'S SELF-IMMOLATION)
MS. TRAN THI DUYEN (ARRESTED JULY 24, 2001 IN AN GIANG PROVINCE FOR INVOLVEMENT IN MS. THU'S SELF-IMMOLATION)
(NOTE: MS. NGUYEN THI THU, A MEMBER OF A DISSIDENT HOA HAO ORGANIZATION, KILLED HERSELF BY IMMOLATION ON MARCH 19, 2001 (SEE REF B). MISSION HAS YET TO CONFIRM THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY DUYEN WITH ANY OTHER SOURCES. END NOTE.)

17. (C) DUYEN TOLD THE STAFFDEL THAT THE SITUATION FOR HOA HAO BELIEVERS IN VIETNAM HAD IMPROVED SINCE THE GVN FORMED A HOA HAO ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE AND LEGALLY RECOGNIZED THE HOA HAO RELIGION IN 1999. THE IMPROVEMENTS HE NOTED INCLUDED THE ABILITY OF BELIEVERS TO CELEBRATE OPENLY THE HOA HAO FOUNDING DAY AND THE FOUNDER'S BIRTHDAY. DUYEN EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT SERIOUS RESTRICTIONS REMAINED, INCLUDING PROHIBITIONS ON DISPLAYING THE HOA HAO FLAG AND A BAN ON ORGANIZED COMMEMORATIONS OF THE FOUNDER'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY. HE ADDED THAT THE ELEVEN-MEMBER HOA HAO ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE WAS NOT CHOSEN FREELY BY HOA HAO BELIEVERS AND DOES NOT REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF THE HOA HAO COMMUNITY. HE ADMITTED THAT ALL ELEVEN MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ARE HOA HAO FOLLOWERS, BUT CLAIMED THAT NINE OF THEM ARE ALSO COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERS. "DECISIONS BY THE COMMITTEE REPRESENT GOVERNMENT, RATHER THAN HOA HAO INTERESTS," HE CLAIMED.

18. (C) DESPITE HIS STATED LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED HOA HAO ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE, DUYEN DECLARED THAT HE DOES NOT SUPPORT THE DISSIDENT HOA HAO
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HAO ORGANIZATION ESTABLISHED LAST YEAR UNDER PRE-1975 HOA HAO LEADER LE QUANG LIEM. THAT GROUP IS TOO CONFRONTATIONAL AND ENGAGES IN ACTIVITIES SUCH AS HUNGER STRIKES AND IMMOLATIONS THAT THE FOUNDER WOULD NEVER HAVE APPROVED, CLAIMED DUYEN. THERE ARE OTHER HOAHAO GROUPS, SUCH AS THE ONE REPRESENTED BY MS. HYNH MAI IN THE U.S., SAID DUYEN, THAT ARE MORE MODERATE IN THEIR APPROACH TO THE GVN IN TRYING TO GAIN MORE FREEDOM FOR HOA HAO BELIEVERS. DUYEN ADVISED THAT THE USG ALSO SHOULD TAKE A MODERATE APPROACH WHEN DEALING WITH THE GVN ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES. HE URGED THE USG TO CONTINUE TO ENGAGE THE VN ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, BUT TO REALIZE THAT PROGRESS WOULD OCCUR ONLY ONE STEP AT A TIME.

19. (U) THE STAFFDEL DID NOT HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR THIS MESSAGE BEFORE DEPARTURE.

PORTER

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